

The Builder.

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SATURDAY, APRIL 7, 1849.



FROM the letters received during the past week (such a varied budget, that to reply to them satisfactorily would demand an encyclopaedic mind, and half a dozen pairs of hands), we select for notice those on two or three subjects of more immediate interest. Prominent amongst these are a pile with reference to our brief remark on galvanized iron, and galvanized tinned iron, in a recent number. As we have before now said, we might commend a man or a material every week for a year, and never extort a single acknowledgment from him or its owner,—they stand too well to care for or need the praise of so small a thunderer,—it is simply their due; they have merit, and no thanks to them who observe and admit it. On the other hand, if we but question ever so slightly the infallibility of the man, or express a doubt as to the pre-eminent goodness of the material, a shower of letters forthwith arrives, to prove that although our good opinion is worth nothing, our bad opinion is very differently estimated.

What we said of galvanized iron was comprised in nineteen lines and a half, and was a simple statement of the fact that specimens of the material had been sent to us, which, after two years' use, were full of holes. Now we speak under the mark when we say that we have received, in consequence of these nineteen lines and a half, twenty visits and forty letters! Intentions have been altered, orders suspended: and both the Galvanized Iron Company and the patentee of the Tinned Iron are receiving from different parts of the country constant reference to the paragraph in question.

The majority of the letters are from interested parties, for and against:—from persons engaged in the manufacture or the sale of this material, and from those who consider their interests affected by it. Amongst the former, however, are several, whose testimony in its favour, to the extent of five or six years' knowledge, is entitled to every consideration. It is far from our desire to interfere with the use of the galvanized metal, if it be really a durable material; and we are quite ready to admit that the examples of its failure forwarded to us, if isolated cases, are not to be considered sufficient proof to the contrary. There may have been some peculiarity in the water in each of these cases; and we know very well that under some circumstances even lead is acted on and rapidly destroyed. Dr. Ryan, the professor of chemistry, who has addressed us on the subject, says (as we ourselves have long before this stated):—"I have known cases in which the tubes and lining of leaden cisterns have been acted upon and dissolved by water to such an extent, as to be highly injurious to health, and, in some cases, fatal. Such, also, is the case with copper, under a variety of exposures." There is, in fact, no metal but gold or platinum which will resist every action, either of air or water, to which it may possibly be subjected, even in the ordinary uses of life.

The doctor continues (and by giving insertion to this, which is in truth a testimonial, we are shewing conclusively our willingness to give the material fair play):—"Speaking from

my own observation of galvanized tinned iron, for now more than six years, I am of opinion that it is as little acted upon by either air or water, under the average of circumstances, as either lead or copper. There are circumstances under which the galvanized tinned iron is not applicable; for instance, when the medium in which it is placed contains acid, or acid vapours, an action takes place which must sooner or later destroy the metal.

Nor is it necessary that such acid or acid vapours be in a free or uncombined state, as by the well-known laws of chemical affinity, zinc will displace certain other bases from their combination with acids. If, for example, a piece of zinc be placed in water containing a salt of either iron, tin, copper, or lead, the zinc is dissolved by substitution, while the metal previously in combination with the acid, and held in solution by the water, is disengaged and precipitated, in most cases, in its metallic state. The applicability of the metal is, however, as easily ascertained as the applicability of any other material, under given circumstances; and it only requires the care and attention which an ordinarily prudent and intelligent person would exercise, and which must be exercised in the use of any other material whatever, to know, whether or not the metal is suitable for the purpose to which he intends to apply it."

We make no comparison between the two materials, the galvanized iron and the galvanized tinned iron, and consider the whole question still an open one with us, leaving the public to decide on the evidence before them.

The destruction of the Olympic Theatre by fire, on the 29th ultimo, has led several correspondents to refer to our repeated remarks on the necessity of commodious and safe means of access and egress in theatres and public places, and the fearfully unsatisfactory condition of many of our theatres in this respect. The wildfire rapidity with which the house was entirely consumed would have given little chance of escape to the audience. Had the fire happened when the house was full instead of previously to the opening of the doors, as was happily the case, the majority must have been destroyed,—literally roasted as they stood.

A survey of the stairs and accesses of our theatres should forthwith be made, and such alterations insisted on as might be found necessary for the safety of the public.

It is to be hoped that the fire may lead to the improvement of a part of the town much requiring it, and that the theatre, if rebuilt, will be placed on another site.

Mr. Smirke's paper of last week, on the relative condition of workmen in the seventeenth century and now, has not escaped commentators out of the class to which it was more immediately addressed. The letters, while setting forth the actual condition of many hundreds—must we not say, thousands—of intelligent artisans, are couched in a tone most honourable to the writers and the body which they represent. Our reference recently to the effect of too much union amongst men and too little union amongst masters, has led one working man, the "Old Mason" to whose lucubrations we have before given publicity, to address to us a letter calling upon the masters to protect those men in their employ who refuse to enter into union with others, and not to dismiss them at the dictation of their other men. He says:—

"To illustrate the truth of these remarks:—Some time since a strike took place against Mr. Trego, builder, of Lambeth, in respect of

the four o'clock movement, and the members of a society were prohibited from working for him, or to allow those whom he had employed since such strike, to work with them, under a penalty of 5*l*. A mason who was at work at Mr. Trego's after the strike, having been discharged from his employ, applied at a respectable mason's in Pimlico, and obtained employment. He commenced work, by the foreman's directions: after working about an hour or so some of the masons working in the same shop, informed the foreman that he had been previously working for an obnoxious employer: they further stated their determination to strike unless this man was immediately discharged. The consequence was this man was compelled to leave his work, take his tools, and quit the premises at a moment's notice,—and that through the conspiracy of the members of this society. The foreman informed him that it was through no ill-feeling on his part that he was discharged, but that he could not think of keeping him at work and be the cause of all the others leaving their employment. This man, then, must either join a society which is obnoxious to him, and illegally combined against him and others, or he must lose the benefit of his labour, which will be to take away his means of existence. Thus he is deprived of the liberty of an Englishman; he must only work how, when, and where others choose to dictate, and break the laws of his country to fulfil those of their making."

The same writer, a working man be it remembered, says, in another communication on the subject of equality,—"If the liberty that I take encroaches on the liberty of another, it ceases to be true liberty, and wears the aspect of oppression. There is but one method of securing universal liberty, and that is for each individual to be as anxious to promote the welfare of another as his own. We hold this true in theory, but it is a lesson the world has not yet learned to practise. Man is evidently selfish, and if allowed to have the extent of his desires, he often encroaches on the liberties and rights of others. From this we discover the necessity of law and order, without which no man's life or property would be secure. It is for the general good that laws are made and enforced; but the question arises, whether or not one individual should have dominion over many? Are not all men of the same flesh and blood, and ought we not to contend for equality?"

"Those who contemplate nature may discover that the universe teems with an infinite variety. If the eye of the mind, assisted by revelation, penetrates the upper regions, powers, excelling in wisdom and authority, are represented to his view. If we descend below ourselves in the scale of creation, as far as naturalists have discovered, the meanest insects seem to have order maintained among them by a few having authority over the many. Respecting governments among men, we are expressly informed, from the highest authority, that the powers that be are ordained of God, and whosoever resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God. That man enjoys the truest liberty who willingly and cheerfully submits to the proper performance of his duty, rendering to all their dues,—fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour. Bind such a man with fetters of iron; his mind is still in the enjoyment of liberty."

While we find such opinions as these current amongst our operatives, we need not fear the efforts of evil-disposed agitators.